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**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: JUNE ROCK
INTERVIEWER: SUZETTE COTE
DATE: MAY 23, 1988**

**S = SUZETTE
J = JUNE**

SG-NA-T039

Okay, this is Suzette Cote, and I'm interviewing June Rock at her home on May 23rd, 1988. And this is for the project Shifting Gears, the Changing Meaning of Work in Massachusetts.

S: Okay June, I just want to ask you some questions about Sprague's. Okay. First I'd like to start with um, your family background. Like um, like your grandparents names, where they came from and that.

J: Um, my grandmother on the Rock side was Daniel and Delia Rock. Uh, they lived here up on Richmond Avenue. My grandmother on my mother's side was Burton and Hattie Dodds. And they lived on High Street where my grandmother died when she was quite young. She was on [unclear] forty-seven my grandmother, so I never knew her.

S: Okay, um, where did they originate? Had they always lived here?

J: They originated from, both sets of grandparents is ironic, lived in Platzburg, New York, and came here many years ago. My grandmother of course did not work, either one of them, except my grandmother Rock had seventeen children.

S: Oh wow!

J: And my grandmother Dodds was in a wheel chair, so she was not able to work. [S: Yeah] Well my grandmother Rock, after her husband died, and my father was fourteen years old, was a great baker. So she did bake for some of the restaurants in town, which was Knolls at the time, which was a diner and considered to have good food.

S: Um, that's cool. Um, okay. So after that had moved from Platzburg did they live here where they worked?

J: Yes, they always lived here. My grandfather worked in the Box Shop, which is now Jarisch Box Shop. [S: Oh, yup] And uh, like I said, my grandmother. My grandfather Rock was a machinist and worked for Hunter Machine Shop up until his death.

S: Oh, okay. Okay, about your parents, about their names and their background?

J: Um, my mother was Mabel Irene Dodds. She worked for only a short time before she was married. And after she married my father she was a housewife. My father worked in about four places. He worked Milanta Shoe Company for awhile. And after that closed he went to the Lime Kill in Adams, which was the [Holland?] Lime Kill. he worked there until he got sick because of the lime. It was very irritable to his lungs. So he had to leave there. Then he went to Gale Shoe Shop and he worked there until the closing of the plant. Also he worked for Wallstreeter Shoe Company. And then he left and went to, Windsor Print Works. And then he went to Arnold Print Works. And he stayed in Sprague Electric Company up until his retirement when he was sixty-five.

S: Oh, so your father, your father also worked?

J: Yeah, yeah.

S: Oh, that's interesting.

J: And uh, plus the fact that my father always did papering and painting for people on the side. This was one of the reasons why my mother had to work, because he always held two jobs.

S: Oh, that's (--) Okay. Um, now about yourself. Maybe um, your childhood and what it was like. Um, where (--)

J: Um, my childhood was a very happy childhood. I spent a lot of time with my grandfather Dodd, and my aunts and uncles. I enjoyed myself. Uh, we lived way up on a hill, which was called Richmond Avenue. And in the wintertime we would slide down on cardboards. Of course there weren't as many cars as we have now. But it was most enjoyable. And um, then we moved to River Street where I went to Freeman School. And then I graduated from Drury in 1946.

S: Oh, okay. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

J: I have um, I had three brothers and a sister. One of my brothers was killed when he was only twenty-two by a car. And uh, and my other brother just died last year at the age of fifty-five, he was a teacher. And I live with my brother. My both, both of my parents have died.

S: Oh, that's too bad. Um, okay, so you grew up here all of your life?

J: All my life. I lived on River Street, well we lived in Adams for a short time. Then we came back to North Adams and I lived with my grandmother for a short time. And then we lived on

River Street for twenty-five years. And then we bought this house and we'll be, November we will be here twenty-five years.

S: That's a long time. [J: Yeah] Okay. How about schooling? You said you went to Freeman School. What about elementary?

J: I went to the Freeman School. I went to Mark Hopkins for a short time when I lived off, with my grandparents. Then I went up to Freeman's where I graduated, and then of course went to Drury.

S: Was Drury? That was for four year?

J: A four year.

S: Was it, start at Freshman? Freshman, okay.

J: Yeah, like uh, [S: like it is now] like it is now. The only thing is it was on East Ninth Street. We uh, of course twenty, I graduated forty, almost forty-two years ago. So the school of course was newer than what it is now. Um, we had a lot of activities in school. [S: Yeah, that's good] Dances, and I was on the basketball team. And uh, of course I didn't really care for it, because they had the girls rules where you could only go half court. I don't know if they do that now, [S: unclear] but you couldn't, and you couldn't shoot, if you were a guard shoot, you know. You just, so I mean they had a lot of different rules than what they do now.

S: Um, okay. What about your church? Your church experience?

J: I went to uh, both churches. See my father and mother. My father was Catholic and my mother was Protestant. So they decided that they were going to let us decide. So for a long time I went to both churches. I finally decided that I would be Catholic and I went to Saint Francis Church. And I made my First Communion. And uh, but I still went to the Baptist church. Unfortunately the priest wasn't too happy, because I was elected president of the Baptist Youth Fellowship. And when he saw that in the paper he said to me(--). Well you know, in those days uh, they're not, they were not as friendly as they are now. And there were certain things that you weren't suppose to do. Then I decided that both of you know, I would try to understand both of the religions. And I enjoyed, enjoyed it. [S: That's good] I made my Confirmation at Saint Anthony's, when Bishop Weldon, it was his first class that he ever Baptized. [S: yeah] So that's quite a few years ago.

S: Yeah. Okay. Um, how about early work experience. Like what you did?

J: I worked in Gale Shoe Shop when um, I was sixteen. I worked in uh, uh, tying up boxes by twelve, twenty-four and thirty-six. And then we had to bring them to where the people would put the shoes in the boxes. I didn't care for that job, so I quit. And um, the boss asked my father where I was, and he said, oh, she's here. Un-be-known to my father I just quit. [S: Yeah, didn't] And he just, so anyways his boss said to him, if he didn't like my father as much I probably never would have got the job back, but he told me to come back the next day and I got an excellent job.

A shoe girl, which you, the girls would be inspecting the shoes before they put them in the box. And they wouldn't notice maybe an eyelet, or maybe the tongue wasn't just right, or something. And we had to go to the different department bringing them. And then we had to bring them back after the ladies repaired the shoes.

S: Oh. Was that mostly just the women did that kind of work, or?

J: Well because most of it was finished work we did have some men that uh, like putting the eyelets in. We had some of the men do it. But it was mostly uh, women.

S: Yeah. Um, any other work experience that you had before you went (--)

J: I've worked in Sears and Roebucks taking orders on the phone, which was really hard, because we used to get some of these older Polish, or French people that had terrible accents [S: oh god!] and you couldn't understand them. And you know, and it was really trying, because you know, when you're talking on the phone it's harder anyways. And when you're talking to someone who has an accent it's even worse.

S: I can imagine. Um, about what time period was this? Like what?

J: Uh, around 1948, 1949. [S: Okay] Because I went to Sprague's in 1951. And in between I did take care of my grandfather for awhile. Uh, take care of my uncle's house, because my grandfather was older and needed to have somebody stay with him. So I did that for awhile.

S: Oh, that's nice. Um, okay. When did you, are you married?

J: No, I never married.

S: You never married, okay. Okay. All right. We'll start right in on your work at Sprague's then. When you started?

J: Well when I, after my grandfather had died uh, I was friendly with Marion Caron's daughter. And uh, one day I happened to be walking down Holden Street and Ginger came out. And she said, my mother wants to know what you're going to be doing? And I said, well I don't know, because you know, I'll have to find a job. So she told me to come in and at least sign up my name. And that if a job became available I have to have registered to want to work there before I could get hired. So it was a short time, maybe about a month later, she called me and told me she had three openings. And I went in and she told me that she had a job on Marshall Street and on, in the Beaver, and on at Brown Street. And seeing I lived on River Street, didn't have a car, I decided the best place to work would be Marshall Street because I could walk back and forth. And so that's when I went into special pack. And I used to run a mimeograph where we'd put the bags in the um, into the machine, and they would tell you what unit was in there. And I would have to do, sometimes we had five thousand units, I would have to run off five thousand bags. [S: Wow] Or sometimes we had five units and then I only ran five bags. So I did that for awhile. And then I was clerk. I did the uh, pay, I did the payroll and um, kept records and did their vacations and their credit union. And then after that I went into shipping for a short time.

And I worked in the traffic department where we used to give out uh, what routes, or if they needed trucking, or shipping these goods to different places. We used to have to [unclear]. And sometimes they would have sent a shipment out, and they would call up and say, or write us and tell us that they never received the shipment. So we used to have to call the trucking companies, or the airlines, or at one time it was rail express, or the post office. We used to have to wait a certain amount of time and sent out a form and try to help them find out where they were. Or sometimes they were in a hurry for this and, and somehow the uh, units were taking longer. So we would have to call the trucking company and they would tell us where they were. And sometimes we'd have to make a special way to get them. Sometimes they would go pick them up, sometimes the trucker would expedite, you know, the shipment faster than they were. It was only suppose to take a number of days to do this, and uh, but we were always getting different things. And also uh, I used to work with the um, the president of the company, not himself directly, but like his secretary would call in and say, um, gee Mr. Sprague sent for something, he hasn't received it. So I would have to get all of the information and call and find out how it was shipped. And then try to get a hold of the people that shipped it out, and try to find out where it was. So that was the, I liked that very much. [S: That's good] And you talked to quite a few people. [S: That's good]

Then I did work for your father for a short time in uh, doing purchasing. I also did filters. Ran off orders. Um, did quite a few things. Did shipments to Los Angeles [S: Oh yeah] and so on. Then I left there and I went to the machine shop where I was the only girl. [S: Oh wow] I worked with sixty-two men at this time.

[S: Wowe] And they were very nice. [S: That's good] In fact sometimes, one of my bosses names John Ortman came down one day and he said to me, how do you like working? They treated you very nice. In fact I was only there filling in for three months. And when I left I received two nice gifts from them. And I was really surprised because only being there a short time. [S: Yeah, well that's nice] Then I went to um, downstairs in the Export Department where I stayed until finally our department left. They were not going to leave us go. They, in the beginning they told us there was no reason, we were doing a great job. Nobody else, you know, they didn't want to take the job away. And this was in December of uh, 1984. And then uh, one day when I was walking through the plant one of the girls said to me, oh, your department's leaving? Of course it was a complete shock to me. And I did walk back into the office, and I went right into my boss's office, because I was the union rep. for the room. And I said to him, I just got quite a shock and I need to know whether it's true or not. And he said, yes it was. And so I said, I suggest that you tell the girls immediately before someone else finds out the way I did. So he went in and talked to our other boss and uh, in about a half hour they called a conference and they, that's when they told us that we were leaving.

S: Why was that again? That (--)

J: They were leaving because they, the, not because we weren't doing a good job, it was because they decided (--) First of all they weren't going to bring a lot of the place down there. But then they decided that they were going to take our department and send it. [S: Oh] Not because um, it was a hard time that they had when they went down there, because of uh, you know, we all knew what we were suppose to do, and uh, unfortunately they didn't take everybody down there. They just took a few. We had a big room. Lois Dean worked with me. And she uh, she finally, mostly all of the girls that uh, did work with me, we had about twelve girls, they all either got

other jobs, or they went um, retired. [S: Yup] I didn't work for two years, and then I, I did temporary work down at Heritage Park where I'm working now. And I uh, am now a full time employee. [S: That's good] We have different programs for children. Uh, we have craft shops. I have tot-time. Those are two to five year old that come in and we play, we color. Whatever they want to do. It's not, we try not to make it like a school. We want it (--) And this is to get them acquainted so that they can play with other children. Some of them only are the only child, so they really don't have anybody. Or they have brothers and sisters that are in school, and so they don't play. During the summer we're only going to have one class, because (--) And the nice weather I'm sure that you know, they have other things they want to do.

S: Yeah. Um, I was wondering about um, you said that your father I think worked at Sprague's you said? Did you get in it because um, (--)

J: My father got in Sprague's because the Arnold Print Works went out. And he went in a applied for a job and got it. He was custodian for, I think he worked there about four to five years. And then uh, he was going to have to leave anyways, because he was getting emphysema. [S: Oh] But he was old enough to retire, so he did retire.

S: Did you get into Sprague's because of, because he was there? Because you were (--)

J: No, I got in Sprague's, no because my father at that time was working um, other places.

S: Oh, okay.

J: No, I got my own job through the help of Marion Caron.

S: Yeah, okay. Um, let's see. Um, what kind of machines did you have to work on, or like the skills that you had to learn? Did you have to like learn different things, or?

J: Well we did have uh, uh, um, mimeograph machine that we used. Also there's an ant that probably came in from the flowers. And we did have all of these um, I had a, I don't know what kind of machine, but I used to have to run off the paperwork. Excuse me. [hear toilet flushing] Okay. I used to have to run the paperwork off for your father to put in the shipment. It was like a little mimo machine. And we had certain ones that we sent down with the shipment, or we had certain ones that stayed in our office so that when the schedulers would need to look up a shipment, they'd have the paperwork. [S: Oh] And then also one piece of paper went with the shipment, so when they got to wherever it was going, they would know what they had.

S: Yeah. Okay. Um, (--)

J: Also I used a postage meter. That was when I was the mail girl. And that was, you put the uh, whatever you had to ship out, you put the stamp on. We had the scale, weigh it, and then it would automatically go in. Sometimes if I had twenty-five or thirty letters, it only took like two minutes to run, because it was on, run automatic. And instead of stamps it was a postage paper that was sticky on the outside. And all you did was, it would automatically go on, or you would put it on by licking. We had a little stamp thing with water that we would uh, put the stamps on.

S: Oh, so all the machines there at the time you work were automatic pretty much?

J: Electric, electric you know, typewriters. Everything. When I went in, no, we didn't use anything manual. Even when I went in the beginning typewriters at that time were electric, which was harder to get used to, because uh, when you use a standard one and then you go on to electric on, it's a lot faster and it's got a different touch.

S: Yeah, it's a different, yeah. Okay. Describe your typical day. I don't know if it was different when your job things changed, but like what was a day like?

J: Well in the morning out in traffic, we always had paperwork that we would check the bills of lading that went out. And uh, then we would have things, rates that we would have to figure out, and [unclear] here. Um, because sometimes the company paid for a part in Sprague's, so we would have to give her the figure so that she could uh, you know, know how much to charge the companies, like Collins. And then we had other companies like in Sprague Electric company that paid for their own. And they, they would just bill them, like [unclear], or Nashua, or whatever, or Los Angeles. They also had [unclear]. And the stuff that we would sent up, and they got charged for the postage. It was like being a different company and they had their own expenses. [S: Okay] So then we'd have things to type, routings to type. A lot of phone calls, because people are looking for shipment. And then we would uh, do uh, one of the times that I was there I made a manual for shipping so that we could sent it to the different offices so that they would know how to ship out something, how to do the paperwork. And we had to type that up and put it in a book.

S: Oh, did you work um, was it mostly assembly line, or type of work, or was if office?

J: I worked, the only time that I worked in assembly line is when I worked in special pack, and that was envelopes. And the girls that were doing the actual physically packing would take these envelopes and then put their units in there. and then we had a machine that sealed them. [S: Yeah] Every unit got heat sealed into this machine. [S: Hm, that's interesting] No matter how big, or how small. Sometimes we'd have a unit that was really large, or we, sometimes we had little units that were so small, but they all got special package with either some kind of wrapping. And then they also, some of them had to have desica, that was to keep the moisture out of the unit.

S: Yeah, okay. Um, were there like um, how about the differences in the wages like between the men, men's pays and (--)

J: When I first started to work in Sprague's um, I was making about sixty cents an hour. The um, I think, I'm not sure about the men, because of course I never discussed their pay, but I think their pay was similar to our. At that time it wasn't very much when we worked in, when we first started working in Sprague's.

S: Yeah. Um, did you get like good benefits. Were the working conditions (--)

J: When I uh, we first started, we of course we always had health insurance, we always had holidays. Um, we didn't have sick days when I first started. Then uh, we had life insurance. Then we finally did get personal days off. We got three days off is you were sick, a year. [S: Yeah] And then um, it all depended how many years you were there. It always seem to be that I had been there for a certain period of time. And the first years that I was there you were suppose to work five years. So you had one vacation. When I was there going on six years, they decided that after a year you would get the two weeks vacation. So I never really lucked out like some of them who were only there a short time and they got their two weeks. [S: Oh, that's too bad] And it was the same way when I was working eighteen years and you got three weeks. And then when you were there over twenty-five years you always got a watch, and you always got five weeks vacation.

S: Oh, that's good. That's good. Um, how about um, the working conditions, and were there any real health problems with some of the conditions?

J: No, where I, when I, where I worked it was uh, mostly uh, in the special pack it had to be clean, because of the units that were there. When I, in the offices were where I worked, were always clean. [S: That's good] We had no um, hazardous material. Once in awhile there would be shipping, but the containers were well marked so that we knew which was hazardous and which wasn't. [S: Okay] That was a unique way they had to ship these. They had to be well outside. The people who were handling them new that they were hazardous material.

S: Oh, well that's good. At least they labeled them. Um, how about as time went on, did you get, the benefits, or your promotions, or pay, did they increase?

J: Yes. When you were there a certain period of time, after a year they always evaluated you, and usually you would get a certain, you had like a pay scale for so many months, years, that they checked on.

S: Okay. Um, how about um, was the work place, and was that well organized? The structure, like what was the structure, how was it set up?

J: It was uh, when I worked in special pack it was set up in a way that they had tables where the girls worked. And then I had a machine that was, that I could see all the girls. And sometimes when they were, the girls were on special project, when they would, I would have to run off their material, because sometimes it wasn't very much, and it didn't take very long. So I had to keep running off these special things. And then there were times when I would run off like five thousand envelopes. So that um, it was well organized. [S: That's good] The material that the girls had to work with, and the material (--) I had a little shelves in back where there were the envelopes, then different sizes. And then when they would get low, I would go to another cupboard and just pick up the envelopes to add, so that it was easier for me. So no, it was well organized.

S: That's good. How about like friendships, like with the people? You said you enjoyed working with the people.

J: Yes I, I had uh, when I first started to work in special pack I had a lot of friends that we remained friends for years.

S: That's nice.

J: Um, one of my friends and her husband was very nice to me. Always brought me out to lunch.

S: Oh that's cool. That's good.

J: And they would always insist on paying. And she had, her husband died unexpectedly. And so we were quite good friends until she remarried. We went on vacations together.

S: Oh that's good.

J: And when I went to the shipping room there was several girls that I was very friendly with, and we went on vacations together. In fact when they got married I stood up for two of them. I was the maid of honor. And also when they had children I was their godmother. So I have [S: Wow, that's really good], yeah, I have three godchildren.

S: With people at Sprague? That's really neat. That's cool.

J: Yeah, we had, we had a nice relationship. We used to go out to dinner a lot. Um, we had Christmas parties all the time. It was um, in those days Sprague Electric Company was a lot different than what it is now. People uh, liked each other and they weren't always worried about who was going to (--) If somebody got a promotion everybody was happy. And as the years went by it was a little more difficult. They didn't, it wasn't as friendly a situation.

S: Oh, people would get angry at other (--) It's sort of like a competition like?

J: Yeah. Too much, too much so. Like I said, when we first worked there it was all together different. It was also the bosses that we worked for. Of course people have different personalities.

S: Yeah, that's true. Okay. Um, what did you doing during like your lunch breaks and stuff?

J: Our lunch breaks? Lots of times in the beginning uh, we used to stay in and eat. And then when we finished we always walked down on Main Street. Sometimes we'd buy something, or sometimes we'd just looked around. Or other times we'd just take a walk. Sometimes we'd walk from Marshall Street down on, down to Brown Street just for the exercise. In the wintertime of course we didn't do as much, but we always managed to walk down Main Street, because we always figured we needed to have that exercise.

S: Yeah, that's good. Um, how about any, any childcare, responsibilities?

J: Yeah, I did work for a short time in child, um, the daycare center at [Hasken?] School. I only

worked there three months and I enjoyed it very much. I was a teacher's aide. And we taught. Sometimes we had different kinds of paintings. We used chocolate pudding for one, and we used uh, which was really messy. But when it was nice out we went out a played. We had play grounds. We uh, I helped them with their lunch. And um, when they would have their nap just right after dinner, made sure they washed their face. And everybody had to have a toothbrush, brush their teeth. And then they all had naps and they would lie down. And it was, we had a lot of fun. I did, I enjoyed it very much. I only worked there three months, because I excepted this job at the Western Gateway Heritage State Park.

S: Yeah, that's nice. Um, how about as time progressed and it got later, were there any changes at Sprague's? Like changes in the work processes?

J: Yeah, the attitude was uh, as just before, it got to be sad because we had the strike. And I was a union officer. And the company before me went on strike had taken some work out in big trucks and sent them to different places. And some of the stuff never came back. Some of it did. It was sad because um, a lot, you saw a lot of your friends losing their jobs because of um, they uh, either didn't do that kind of work, or they had already sent it out. And um, a lot of the things did go to different plants, Nashua, and otherwise. It never came back. We had probably about four thousand people between Rivers, uh, between Brown Street, Marshall Street, Union Street and the Beaver. [S: yeah] So that all of those plants closed. And the only thing that we did have, we still have Brown Street, but it's not really working for Sprague Electric Company anymore. The only place (--) And of course Marshall Street is now closed. And they down on the Curran Highway, where they have Filter Division, and also they have Tantelum Department. So that there's probably only about seven hundred people left between management and hourly people, which is really quite sad.

S: Yeah. It's too bad. It was good for the community.

J: Company, yes. And the company really, they didn't realize that they had such good workers, because they had skilled workers who had done certain things for years and years [S: yeah] and knew what they were doing. And then as they went to different plants they didn't have the skills that the production people had here. And of course it uh, a lot of the things that they had (--) They sent some things to Mexico, and most of the time when it came back from Mexico the people in the Filter Division had to do over. [S: Oh] Like some of the core windings and stuff like that, because they weren't as skilled as we are. And I don't think they even had the education that we had. Most people had a high school education, or if they didn't have a high school education at least they had a grammar school education. [S: Yeah] Especially in the earlier years. Uh, nowadays of course mostly everybody does graduate from high school at least. [S: Yeah] Some of them go to a technical school.

S: Yeah. Um, how, what was the hardest part of your job, and some, some of the enjoyable parts? Like what did you like the best? And what parts were really hard?

J: In the traffic department the hardest part was to try to find these shipments that were lost. And your boss would, or the people that were looking for it were very impatient, because they needed it like two days ago. Because maybe one of their lines was closed down. And it, it put a

lot of responsibility for you. You know that some of these people were going to get layed off if they didn't get the material. And so that it made you try to find out what happened. And sometimes it would take two days to find out where the shipment was. And the people that were looking for the shipment kept calling, you know. And you're trying your best. So I think that you know, that was one of the things that was the most (--) Most of the other jobs were uh, when I worked in filters was uh, during the shipping time we had just so many hours to get that paperwork out, and then we would have rush shipments that that had to get out fast. And so you were sort of always going um, hurrying and trying to you know, get the shipments out before(--) You had a deadline down in the shipping room, because they had to get their paperwork out so that they could get them on the trucks, or UPS, or AIR, or whatever it had to go. So they needed a little time. So you were rushing to make sure you got your stuff out so that they could get their material out.

S: Yeah, okay. How about your um, your relations, um, your relationships between, like your supervisors, were they good, or (--)

J: Um, most of the time um, we had a good relationship, you know. Like during someone's birthday we had birthday parties and things like that. But you always um, with your supervisors it wasn't as uh, in work. You know, you had to, they had to sort of not be as friendly, because uh, you know, if you did something wrong they had to tell you, or whatever. Management people all you know, you sort of (--) Well they were nice and you had uh, most of the time you had a good relationship, but it wasn't like working with another employee where you know, you didn't have to try to make your boss happy, or to make sure you were doing the right thing. So that there was sort of a little bit of difference between them and working for, working with your peers.

S: Yeah. Um, well did you ever have any conflicts between the supervisors, or anything over any issues?

J: I don't really think we had conflicts. I mean there was sometimes you weren't too happy with some of the things that they told you to do, but they were also being told by upper management that you had to do this. So you just always sort of took it in stride.

S: Yeah. That's good. Okay, um. Okay. This is probably where you can, strong input on um, the union activity. I heard you were a big one in (--)

J: Yeah. I was always um, I joined the union. And during the strike I worked night and day on um, on the picket lines, and did uh, especially when we were on strike, I made the coffee, made sure people had donuts. In the wintertime especially uh, because it was in the, it was cold, we had snow on the ground. And we used to go out to make sure the people were all right. Uh, one of the things, I was able to go to uh, meetings with the company when we were discussing the wages and our, what our package was going to be. It was very frustrating, because uh, they always, at the beginning you know, they never wanted to talk about certain things. They wanted to uh, one of the most important things was our vacation and our health benefits. And they always waited until the last minute to do that, which was very frustrating. And especially uh, lots of times when uh, when we uh, we wouldn't be very close. And the people would be you

know, frustrated because here we're not getting what we're suppose to be getting. I think the worst time of negotiations of course is the time that we went on strike. And it was the company, all we wanted was two cents more. And somehow we just didn't jive and we just didn't get on it. And so then they decided they would strike. Our union was the first union to go on strike. And um, (--)

S: When was this?

J: Uh, 19, around 1970's. And the first uh, we had our picket line. And of course if you're a union person you do not cross the picket line. Nowadays it's different. If you got a contract, if you don't sign your contract you had a chance of being fired. But in those days your honored the picket line. So that the IUE stood across, you wouldn't come in. We had many bad time. They finally had to call in a mediator. They went, our union officials had to go to Washington, [S: Oh wow!] where they had a mediator. And they did talk over and finally settled the strike after ten weeks. We only made four dollars by the way, when we were on strike, which didn't even buy your gas at the time. [S: Oh gee] So that um, (--) And it wasn't so bad for me. My father and my brother at the time were all working in Sprague's. So we really didn't have much money coming in the house. I had bought a car, so I had to go to the bank and tell them that I you know, and all I had to do is pay the interest on that. That was uh, very serious to me. And finally when we did go back to work everybody was glad, because now finally we were getting a paycheck.

S: Yeah. Well you were involved in the union like you said. Um, did you (--)

J: I was, I'd been an officer for uh, I'm still an officer in fact. At the moment I'm uh, the public relations officer. And my job was one of the ones that, very unique, because I had good will with the other union members. I'm the one that's responsible, like we used to have a Christmas part. And the girls and everybody would chip in. [S: Oh that's good] And we used to have all kinds of casseroles and stuff like that. And we gave away little money so that uh, gift certificates like at a grocery store. And we had other little gifts that we had. And we always have a social after our meeting. And um, we can have, they give us two tickets and we can have a drink or buy a soda, whatever we want. And we have potato chips and popcorn. Sit together and talk about old times, or talk about what's going on in everybody life, which is enjoyable.

S: Yeah, that's good. Okay, I'm just going to stop this for now and we'll turn over.

J: All right.

SIDE ONE ENDS

SIDE TWO BEGINS

S: Okay. We're continuing, still continuing with the first section of our interview. Okay, um, how did your work at Sprague's affect your home life and the friendships you had, and also your community involvement?

J: Well in my family life, we had, you know, we had a good life as far as money wise. We all sort of contributed to the household. So that helped a lot. We as a family, with my brother and

my father working there for awhile, my brother worked there eighteen years. So that uh, we had a nice relationship. With my employee, uh, people that I worked with, we had uh, most of the people that I've ever worked with, we always had a nice relationship. And Filters, the uh, at that time I was a young twenty-two and skinny, and they always used to bring in food, because they thought that I need to be fattened up. And they were bringing in like Syrian food and, and all, [S: Oh god] but, which was delicious. And um, they used to bring in pizza. And they used to bring in uh, at those time we didn't have the pizza shops that we have now. So pizza was always excellent. Homemade from the families. And they used to bring in cookies and cupcakes. And we were always having, at our afternoon break we always had some kind of a goodie. Even at breakfast time sometimes they'd bring in things that they had made, muffins, or someone would bring in donuts. And um, our fifteen minutes was always one of our highlights of the day, because we always knew we were going to have something to eat. And it always went by fast. We did have, in those days we had the wagons that came over anyways, that the men, little, well they were boys, that would push these wagons. And they had on them cookies, or they had muffins, and donuts, and coffee, and milk, and juice. And on Saturdays if you worked we always had westerns, which were really great. And they managed to keep them warm. So that uh, I always, every Saturday that was my specialty, to have that. And then somedays when it, in the beginning of course, we didn't have the uh, if we didn't have the cart to go around our boss would let us go down to a coffee shop and take orders from everybody and bring it back. So the person that went out always had a little extra break, because we had to get the food. [S: Yeah] And I was always volunteering, because I thought that was wonderful just to get out. And most of our um, some people used to play cards within fifteen minutes. Some people used to like to read, which um, I never cared about that, because by the time you spent fifteen minutes reading, you probably get to an interesting part and uh, [S: too late] and it was you know, at fifteen minutes you had to stop. And so I never cared about reading, because I didn't want to miss what was going on.

Other voice: My aunt said she played canasta.

J: Yeah. And uh, we all had different times. You'd go into another person's department and it you didn't know what time the break was, you know, you didn't really want to interfere with their break, because that was the only time they (--) So most of the time you went back to your office, or waited. If it was like five minutes you'd wait, because sometimes you'd walk quite a ways. And they, of course the building were all numbered. I was very fortunate that I always knew where the buildings were. And everybody would say to me, now how do you get to this building, or how do you get to that building? Or if my boss needed to have something brought to another department, he'd always asked me if I knew where it was. And I thought, oh, that's great you know, to just get out and walk in the plant and see all these different people. You know, as you go through, "hi, how are you." And it was uh, it was nice.

S: That's good. Um, you said you started working in 1951. [J: 19, umhm] So I don't, obviously you don't know, but at least at Sprague, I don't know, maybe you do at Sprague's, what it was like during the great depression, or is that before your (--)

J: No, I don't re (--) No, I don't. I do know the depression only because I was, in 1928 and 1929, uh, my father had a, was layed off. Uh, the Electric Company came in a turned off our

electric light. And we had kerosene lamps. And in those days we didn't have bathtubs like you got now. We used to have big tubs.

S: On legs?

J: On legs. [S: Wow, those are neat!] And my father and mother, you know, everybody had to have a bath. Of course you didn't (--) You never heard of taking a bath every day like you do now, because it's a lot more convenient. It was too hard to give every, all the kids a bath every (--) But they would give you a sponge bath. And every Saturday, that was bath day, and have your hair washed. Now a days everybody washes, most young girls and fellows wash their hair every day, and use some kind of method to dry it. And also to uh, [S: style it] fix it. But we didn't do that. You know, of course in those days it was hard, because we didn't have the things that you had. We had, our electricity was turned off for, for quite awhile. And I can remember my parents saying, now don't run, because if you run you might knock the lamp over and that was one of the thing. And we lived in [unclear] at that time, which is between where the midway is. They call it Bounty Fair now. And when I was young that wasn't there. It was a field and it had a gasoline station there. Now it's the restaurant.

S: Yeah. Okay. Um, how about world war two and the post war?

J: When, well I was in high school when um VE Day and VJ Day were on. And um, of course they, the bells were ringing all over town. And um, our superintendent of schools decided that they were going, weren't going to let us out. Well we could hear all the people down one Main Street. They were parading about, because when VJ came it was the end of the war. And we decided that we weren't going to stay there. And there was no way that any teacher was going to hold us there. So we jumped out the windows. In fact they have pictures where some of us, where some kids were jumping out, others were running down the stairs. And we went down to Main Street where we had, where they had this big parade. And we, all the church bells, and the cow bells, and all kinds of things going on. It was a joyous day, because most of the people had brothers or sister, or fathers, or even mothers that were in the service, or relatives, some relatives that we knew were going back. And so that everybody was so happy. A lot of people went to church to pray that you know, to thank God for ending the war. [S: Yeah] And um, most of the people at that time uh, were very religious. And uh, they always uh, were worried about their loved ones overseas in Japan. And of course they had the um, the atomic bomb which uh, was uh, bad.

S: Yeah. How was it, like what was sort of you know, Sprague's like? Like um, how did it affect your employment. And like well how was it different like from when it started?
[Comment unclear]

J: Well when I, when I first started Sprague's was all together different. It was um, more of a family type. And at that time it was reliability. Instead of making units it got to be um, everything was very slow to make sure that the units that you were making were very well done. After awhile it got to be quantity. And once they did that when they went into the quantity, and of course it affected the people that had to do this, because you had to have a certain number of units per day. If you didn't have that certain number of units per day, and it stand to reason that

you know, if you're rushing they're going to be more rejects. So that you had to do this, otherwise you would have got layed off. If you didn't make a, if you didn't make a certain amount they could lay you off. So that was one of the bad things, because the mark of reliability was out, and it was now quantity. And we had, in one department when I worked in filters downstairs where they made ceramics, they decided to put them on piece work. And that they had, and they always had a range of ninety-nine percent good material, and one percent rejects. Well they were down, they did that and of course they had, they had set the bonus rate quite high. And um, they had to make it or else. And so when they were doing that they were making so many mistakes and ruining so many units that they finally had to stop that and go back to the old method where they uh (--) And as soon as they did that, in a matter of a week or so the units were a lot better. They had gone back to the 99%. By a weeks time or so it was like 50% was bad and 50% was good, which is really too bad, because you're really losing money.

S: Yeah

J: By rushing.

S: Yeah.

J: So I think that's one of the things that uh, as time went on you know, it was uh, in the beginning it was more towards making good units. And then they decided well they needed to have more units out so they could make more money, which uh, and most of the departments turned out to be disastrous.

S: Okay. We'll continue the second interview, second part. Okay, um, let's see. So we already basically discussed how um, the, how the work progressed and went from just the quality basically to quantity was more important. Um, and did your wages ever increase? Like how did they increase?

J: Oh yeah, our wages were uh, like I said, I probably, when I first went in I was making like sixty cents an hour. [S: Yeah] And then uh, I did go up into, over six dollars an hour. So that from the time that I was there for twenty-five, yes, it was uh, you know, a great deal of difference. Plus one of the things that we did benefit from when I first went in, um, we didn't have a pension. And we finally got that, but I was too young to join. I had to be twenty-eight. So I had to wait a few years before I could join our pension plan. But it has worked out really well. You know it, it helped a lot of the people. Especially now, Sprague Electric Company, when you retire you get a pension, which I'm going to retire from Sprague Electric Company in July of this year. And I'll pick up my pension. I won't get the full benefit, but uh, [S: Yeah] and then when I turn sixty-two I'll be collecting my social security.

S: Okay. Um, did the working conditions changed at all?

J: Yes. Um, I think one of the things that we had were cleaner working places than we did have. Um, the uh, we had coffee breaks for fifteen minutes. And we mostly, all of, at one time you sat right at your work place, but proved to be not very good for some of the units and the material.

So they made places where you did take your break, which was a lot better, because you had tables and chairs to sit at. That was one of the benefit.

S: Yes. Okay. Um, let's see. How did the, the structure and the organization of the, of Sprague's change, or didn't it change?

J: Yeah, it did change a lot, because it was mainly Mr. Sprague that was in charge. And then they had Mr. Welch. And we people who cared about North Adams. As time changed and he sold the company we had people who really weren't interested in, in what was going on here in North Adams. They didn't really care uh, what, you know, what the employees did. You could see that. The uh, we had a few people that really didn't like North Adams. I don't know why they ever stayed. And uh, it changed because uh, the attitude of the management people in the higher parts were, like the president and the vice president could really care less whether they stayed in North Adams, or if they went someplace else. Because to them it, it didn't matter. It wasn't company loyalty like they had years ago. Most of the people who had, were in the management places, we had Mr. [Teeple?] and also we had Mr. Potter who grew up with the company. So they were really uh, and they were head of different manufacturing. One was at Brown Street and one was the Tantelum Department. They learned through trial and error how to make the units. They um, of course, liked North Adams. They grew up here. They made a living here. Their families were able to go to college, or whatever, because of the wages that the Sprague's gave them. So that years on I don't believe that people really, the people that came in, some came from different cities and they never got into the mixture. [S: Yeah] We had, like we had a Logue paper. And um, the company gave us a picnic in the summertime and a banquet in the wintertime. And all of these people, our bosses were invited to go. And it was a good time for us, because we were able to mingle in a social time instead of just working.

S: Yeah, that's good.

J: And then they did away with that. And um, they, they didn't really see what the use was. But it did help the people in finding out like if you had a like, if you were born you know, they'd put in [unclear] Dick Cote and his wife in Maine. And they'd say uh, it had a baby girl, or there were all these, or birthdays, or little things that really kept up your spirits. [S: That's good] And it, even though you didn't see some of the people, you knew like somebody was in the hospital they would have it in the paper. and all these little things that really didn't mean too much except for if you were an employee of Sprague Electric Company, you know what was going on.

S: Hm. That's special. That's neat. Okay. Um, so you had good personal relationships with your co-workers, which is nice.

J: Yes, I, I, like I said, I still have a girl friend that we go out mostly every Saturday to diner. Her uh, I did stand up for her. She is uh, she has a daughter, and when, her daughter lives in New York. And uh, we go out to diner. And I have her down here and I go over and visit her. And I have several other friends that, we go out to diner. We keep in contact to make sure everybody is all right. So that it, it did, through the years I made good friends.

S: Good. Now we'll get to the more union activity. Okay, um, okay you're, you said you, you

were um, [J: a union officer] a union officer, the Personnel Re(--) [J: Yeah, it's uh] Of the Relations, Public Relations Officer.

J: Public Relations Officer.

S: Okay, were you really involved in organizing like the campaigns and [unclear]?

J: Oh yeah. In fact at one time we had um, we were a different, called a different name. And it was a company uh, more company than it was a union, regular union. [S: Yeah] And so we had to uh, sent out cards to the people that were in, in our unit so that they would sign these cards so that this union could come in. And uh, it was, at that time it was American Federation of Technical Workers. And we got them in. And we got the off, the officer from the International came up and they helped you know, organize. And we had an election and they won out. [S: Oh] So that then we had to decide what name you know, what local we were going to take. So we took Local 101, because every union in the company has a different number. And they're, and especially with the headquarters that are in Washington. The minute they hear 101 they know where we're from. And this is how they really kept this separate. I did play a great deal of getting them organized and getting cards out to the people. And talking to them and telling them why it would be better that they join this union than the other one. And um, we used to have banquets too, every year [S: Yeah] for our members, which was free to the person who belonged to the uh, Local. And if they brought their husbands they had to pay the full price, but that wasn't too bad. One of the thing that we did have changed is our name. Our name is now International Professional Technical Engineers. They changed it to them only because more technical people are now in our union. At one time it was just office workers. Now it's uh Chemists and other people that have other technical qualities.

S: Yeah. Okay. Um, I guess the 1970 strike was like the biggest strike?

J: The 1970 strike was devastating to everybody.

S: Even the people who were striking?

J: Even the people (--) Yes, because um, it was a sad time of our life, because even though we had good times, it was sad, because um, after the strike there were a lot of jobs that were lost that never came back. [S: It's too bad] And of course people didn't have money either. And uh, a lot of them had work. But we had a good time. We used to have, you make the most of what your, of what happens during your time. We had a spaghetti supper to raise money to help some of the people. Uh, we had uh, bake shops you know, because some people didn't have anything. So the ones that we knew, we told them to call us and we did get money from other unions that we could uh, if we knew somebody really, say one child needed a pair of shoes, or somebody needed this, because in that time there were a lot of hardships. Especially if both the wife and the husband were working in the same place. It wasn't too bad if you had a husband or a wife that was working someplace else. At least you were getting an income. [S: Unclear] You may be cut down on some of your things, but um, if you had both of them working in there, no paycheck coming in, it was sort of hard.

S: Yeah. Um, let's see.

J: The thing of it is that most people to this day, you ask them about the strike, we were all in it together. And we all, you know, and they'll say well we really had a hard time, but we did it because we knew we had to.

S: Well what was it for? Was it for higher wages mostly?

J: It was for a two cent higher wage. [S: Oh] And uh, it was too bad because the people that were on the other side of the negotiating team never said to the president and the people that were on the negot... the other side of the negotiating table, they would say, are they going on strike? No, they're not going to go on strike. And of course we kept telling them, you know, if we don't get what we ask we're going to go on strike. And they didn't believe it. And um, [S: it was a shocker] if they, if they had only listened we would have never had a strike. Because probably if they went back and told them really what was going on they probably could have come up with the two cents more.

S: Yeah. So was it mostly out of spite, just to [unclear].

J: No, no. It was because the people just thought that they had had enough, and they needed to get a little better wages. And uh, most of the thing, no. It was never done out of spite. I know that some people do think it, but it wasn't. It was out of, what the people needed, or what they thought they needed.

S: It was the [unclear].

J: The wages. No, what was (--)

S: Yeah. No, but what was it originally?

J: Oh I, I don't, of course everybody made. You can't, I can't really tell you what they (--)
Because most, it all depended on the classification. Like we had machinists who were making you know, a lot more than we were. Secretaries made more than clerk. It was uh, one of the, it all depended on your job title and what you did. The more skilled you were, we have um, technicians who were, worked in laboratories. And they made the units. Of course they still make more money than the uh, because their job is complex. And when they would uh, set up knew items, or capacitors, or whatever, they had to have these people make them. They always made the first one to make sure that they worked. After they were completed the technicians would um, then they would go to a line where the people worked. And then they would start making these new capacitors, or whatever they were making. And then they would go out and uh, with the samples and show them to the different companies. And they would buy the samples. They could tell whether they wanted to buy these units. So that that's why the technical people like that got more money. And if you were a skilled production worker, production workers were very important, because they're the ones who made the material and sent it out. And it all depended on how the quality of that unit, whether it sold or didn't sell. [S: Yeah] They have to make good material, or even now if you don't have a unit that's going to

work, they did do away, unfortunately did away with some of the uh, the units that were made years ago. They don't make them anymore.

S: Oh okay. Um, how are your feelings towards union leaders, or?

J: Union leaders? I always had a, [S: good relationship] I always had a good relationship with them. Sometimes you know, we didn't always want to do somethings that we did. We really never wanted to go on strike, but we just believed that we had to and to show them that you know, they had to recognize us as workers and also to give us better benefits. We used to have at one time, every year, it would be around Christmas time, that bonus. They gave you a hundred dollars. And by the time they took out the taxes it was only \$78.00. So you lost twenty-two dollars. And this became an issue too. They wanted more per hour in their pay and do away with the um, bonus that you got, because like I say, you need like a five cent raise where you were making more money per hour. So that when you brought your paycheck home you had a little more money.

S: Yeah. Um, like we asked before, what was it like on the picket lines?

J: On the picket line it was sometimes very bad. Uh, we had some people who became uh, sort of violent. They um, they went, there were things that were done that um, some cars were hurt by putting sugar in their tanks. And uh, stuff, little things that I didn't approve of and the leadership didn't approve. But during that time, during the strike, if you've ever been near a strike, you realize the things that go on that are heartbreaking. And also these people get really upset with the company. [S: Yeah] That they uh, they don't sometimes use logic.

S: Yeah. [J: It's too bad] About how many people were involved?

J: In my, in our line we had, at that time we had over five hundred people [S: oh my god] on the picket line, but not everybody picketed. The um, we used to have an office on Main Street, which we still have an office, and um, they, when they, during a three hour stunt they would come up. We'd send sometimes coffee down to the coffee lines. They came up during the day. I stayed there night and day. And in the morning my job was to make a big pot of coffee and go pick up the donuts. So that uh, they would come in and discuss what went on in the picket lines. Or during Easter they uh, dressed up. You know, they had hats some of them, that we have pictures where they were marching around in the picket line. People sometimes trying to get in the picket line, especially those that uh, weren't, they thought should be outside helping us. They got sort of a jousting when they went in. Also we had one lady that went in and she had a mask on. And she uh, I don't know why she hit one of the men employees right in the eyes and we had to rush him to the hospital. [S: Oh god!] So uh, [S: it's awful!] yeah. Like I say, it was uh, [S: not too good]. No. But you know, and it's funny. I had a friend that worked during the strike, but she wasn't a union member. And um, I never had any bad feelings about her going in. That was her choice. The had to. Uh, we used to talk on the phone during the strike and we're still friends.

S: That's good.

J: Some people had hard feelings about some of the people that went into work, but you have to go into their life style and find out what's going on. And she, and another thing, she wasn't a member of our union, so uh, that's one of the things. If you're a union member and you're, if you're a really good member, there's no chance of you even deciding what you're going to do. Because you know you're going to go on strike, because that is one of the reasons why you're a union member. You stick to your union through thick and thin.

S: Yeah. I guess I heard it when we interviewed Vera Uberti, that she said it lasted ten to eleven weeks. [J: That's the time, yeah] That seems like a long time to be, I don't know.

J: Well that's because they could not get together and um, come to an agreement.

S: Did they finally (--)

J: They finally, well we had to, yeah. After ten weeks though.

S: So was, all in all when you add it up, was it worth it to do all that do you think, or?

J: Well yeah, we got out, we got an increase in our pay, but we lost a lot of money that I don't think when you're out ten weeks you don't really ever [S: make it up] make it up. [S: Yeah] But uh, you had to do what you have to do. And that was one of the things that we had to go out on strike. And um, I wasn't really in favor of it, but the majority rules.

S: Yeah, I guess (--)

J: You have to, if you're a union member you have to abide by what the union goes by, or else then you're not, you're not really a good member in standing if you don't. [S: Stick to it] You can, like at meetings you can discuss things and uh, before you vote. But what you have to do is when majority rules then you have, even if you're not in favor of it you still have to sort of go by majority.

S: Yeah, well that's good, you know.

J: I mean it's not always um, now if I had a choice at that time I would have never went on strike. [S: Yeah, but] But I had no choice, because they decided that that's what they wanted. They uh, they were fighting for what they thought was more to their advantage. So you just go along with what they want.

S: Yeah. Well I was wondering. How many, about how many unions? Was that the only union that [unclear]?

J: No, we had three unions. We have the IAM, with is the machine shop. They're very small. At one time we had, and that's where I had worked when there were sixty-two men, plus bosses. Um, they're a very small union. And they do very well. They make a lot more because of their skills. And they know how to fix, now sometimes if something broke down the machinist would

go look and they could fix it with material that they had. The IFPTE is the union that I belong to. At one time had a membership of over 500. And now we only have a membership of 70, because all of the jobs have been done away with through the company. Um, the IUE was in the thousands. And now if they got 700, less than 700 hundred people. [S: Oh, they lost a lot] So that it has uh, their decision to move to Mansfield really was devastating to the people who worked there. If you worked there for a certain number of years, especially if you were a production worker and you had certain skills, it's sort of hard to go find another job with that kind of skill. If you were fortunate enough to be either a secretary, or clerical worker it was a little easier, but they still um, we had worked there so many years. We had good benefits and a lot of them never got back the benefits that they lost, and probably never will. [S: Yeah] Even though they work like at colleges, they don't pay well, they don't have as many benefits. Uh, so all and all the move to Mansfield was devastating for us and also for the company, because they lost millions of dollars, [S: wow] which was sort of (--) If uh, at one time I heard that they said, that Dr. John Sprague's said, if he had it to live all over again he wouldn't have ever moved us out. Because uh, the skills that you have for so many years in making units. He thought that the company was doing well, but he didn't realize the company was doing well because of the employees that had so many years and were geared to working. They didn't realize what a devastating effect. Now that's like any employee who went in there to learn a skill, whatever it was, on the unit, making the units, it took awhile for them to learn how to do it. So what they did is they moved too fast first of all. They moved lines out without giving any thought of who was going to make those units when they got there. Because the people are here, they uh, that had been making them. They did take some of their management people, but they weren't skilled in making the units. They were skilled in telling them what, how many units they had to get out and things like that. But the actual production, even during the strike people who worked on the, on the lines couldn't do it, because um, we had an awful lot of shipments that were sent out during that period that came back, because they didn't know how to make the units and they weren't taught to do it. And so that when we went on strike they were just told, well now you're going to work here, and there was not question about it. They had to work there. They had to go in and they had to try to take over what the jobs were. And if you don't have any idea, or if you haven't been on that line, or even if you (--) Say that you were in a different part of the building, you don't know what they're doing? This is what happened.

S: So production [unclear]?

J: Production really fell down.

S: Yeah, that's too bad. Was there um, I heard something about was there any movement to um, Worcester, the Worcester area at all?

J: Uh, Worcester area was really a new development. That's where engineering (--) Dr. Sprague was really interested in that. That was suppose to be, that was suppose to save the company. That is where your new product lines are suppose to come out of. They're suppose to come up where new units, new capacitors and things like that, but it never worked. It really, Worcester was always very bad. Uh, they didn't really hold up their end. At one time they were, thought of selling, but it never came to be. They still had Worcester, but they're always in debt. It's never been a profitable place. They were suppose to move move things into the um, building, the research building at uh, on Marshall Street. That's across from the big plant where people still do

work. And most of the stuff is in building unit and technicians and lab workers.

S: Yeah, okay. Let's see. Okay. Um, let's see. You left Sprague's in [J: 1985] 1985, right.

J: October 11, 1985.

S: Okay. Okay, you, is that when you decided, you retired, is that right?

J: No. I didn't re (--) I haven't retired. I was layed-off. [S: Oh, layed-off] I was uh, that was, our whole department was let go that same day. [S: Right. Oh yeah, that's right] And um, we were, we had decided that we were going out, not unhappy. The month before they told us we were going to leave we put all kinds of decorations all over the place. Easter, Christmas, Valentines Day, all kinds of decorations that we had, we decorated. And for that whole month every afternoon somebody brought in some goodies and we celebrated. And then we decided that we were going to have um, a smorgasbord the day before we were doing to leave. Everybody brought in all kinds of goodies. And then the day that we left we told our boss that we were going to have a breakfast and he was going to bring in the champagne. [S: (chuckles) champagne breakfast] So the two, the two bosses did. And then down here on Ashland Street they have, they had a bear that used to go around with the balloons and everything.

S: Oh yeah.

J: So the two bosses that were left, we had them bring in balloons and we sang "So Long, It's Been Good To Know You." That was in the morning. In the afternoon we went down to the Freight Yard Pub where we had our last dinner. And that was the last time all of us were together. [S: Unclear] So some of the girls that I know went out crying, but we didn't. We went out um, thanking you know, that we did work together, we had a pretty good relationship. You know, like any place else you always have a few problems. Somebody might not be feeling good that day and it'd be a little bit off. [S: Yeah] But most of the time our department was very well as far as social and getting along with people.

S: That's good. Um, how did you feel about when you, [J: when I left?] when they let you know that you were, your department was going to be layed off?

J: I was devastated because I always thought that I would work there till I retired when I would be sixty-two. And then(--)

S: How old were you at the time when you (--)

J: I was fifty-eight.

S: Oh, so you still had a few more years.

J: Yeah, and it was sad because like I said, I always thought that I would work in Sprague's until I retired. I thought, my word what am I going to do! [S: Oh God] I don't know, you know, I didn't even know what I wanted to do.

S: Yeah, cause (--)

J: It's sort of hard. I really didn't want to go back into really clerical work. And uh, the first two years that I was out, I worked, didn't work very much. It was like I worked five months down at Western Gateway Heritage Park in '86. I volunteered. That's how I started, I volunteered to help. Then I finally, then in '87 I was still volunteering. And as I said, I worked down the day care. At that time we had a lot of family illness. My brother was very sick, so I stayed here and took care of him. And my mother was very sick. And unfortunately both of them have passed away since then. So uh, it was sort of good that I was able to spend time with them. And um, then after on December 23rd, 1987, they asked me if I'd like a full time job down at the park and I, I did take it. [S: That's good] Uh, so now uh, for awhile I don't have to worry, but I wish I was old enough so I could just retire.

S: Yeah. Okay. I'm going to stop here again.

TAPE I, SIDE TWO ENDS

SG-NA-T040

J: You're going to hear the train go by.

S: Okay, I'm sorry. Okay. So have you received any (--). Wait a minute. Okay this is a continuation of Part II, Part II interview. Okay, have you received any retirement benefits?

J: Not yet. I will starting in July. I'll get my pension from Sprague.

S: Do you know, do you have any idea how much it will be, or (--)

J: No. I know it's going to be um, a smaller amount. It'll be about three hundred dollars a month.

S: Does that, is that good enough?

J: With your, yeah. With your social security you can manage to, to live comfortably. [S: That's good] You can't be extravagant, but you can live.

S: That's good. Um, okay. As you look back on your Sprague career um, how do you, how do you see it? Like what, how do you see it?

J: I enjoyed my Sprague career. I saw the ups and downs of the company. I really felt bad to think that um, what they did to, to North Adams was devastating. [S: Yeah] I feel bad that

some of the people that were a lot younger than I am uh, who had it very difficult. I was fortunate, I lived with you know, I lived in a house where people were employed. But I would say that you know, especially if your husband was working there and you were working there. And we did get, financially for awhile I made the most money that I ever made that year that I left, because we were given the opportunity to work overtime, which I did so that I was able to make more money. And the only reason why I did work all those hours, which I wasn't crazy about, is that when I was let go I knew that my benefits from unemployment would be a lot higher. And also that my, they gave you a severance pay. [S: Yeah] It all depended on how many years you worked there how much you got. You got your paycheck every week. I was fortunate enough to get my paycheck from the time I left until almost the end of January. So even though I was collecting my unemployment I was really like making two checks, [S: Yeah] which uh, helped a lot.

S: That's good. Um, when you look, as you look back would you decide to do anything differently, or would you just keep it the same?

J: Well I think uh, I enjoyed working in Sprague's. I enjoyed working with the people that I worked. No, I, I don't think, but of course if you knew what, this was going to happen, that you know, Sprague's was going to leave town, I think you [S: {Coughs} Excuse me] probably would have got out sooner and gotten maybe into a different field. But we of course, we never believed that they would even leave. So mostly everybody, even when they told us that, believe me it was uh, devastating.

S: Yeah. [Few words unclear] big impact on the community when a lot of people were working and a lot of people have left.

J: Yes, because you know uh, it depends on people buying at the stores, going to the beauty parlor, the hair dressers, and also barbers. Everything is affected. If you don't have, people don't have an income, they're not able to go out in movies, restaurants. So it's not just the person that uh, works, it's all the people that are in business that it affects. [S: Yeah] Now when I was working I always had a club in Martins to buy shoes. I paid \$5.00 a week. So that I always went to Martins, and always had a lot of shoes. I was just noticing the other day, some of my shoes have started to wear out, that I've got to start thinking about replenishing, because. I still have a few, but I always had at least twelve, thirteen pairs of shoes. [S: My God] Well, and they lasted you know, because you didn't wear the same ones all the time. Also I always had a charge account at Robert's, but then when I knew that I was going leave off, and I wasn't, I just decided that uh, I would not do that again. You know, I wouldn't open my charge account. I haven't used it since 1985. [S: Yeah] I think a lot of people who did have (--) Like I was in a club for Robert's too. You know, and that was another \$5.00 that I always used to pay. So that you would go in and you'd think nothing of it about buying clothes, because you always either had enough money ahead uh, you know in Martin's I always had extra money, because if I had bought a couple of pairs of shoes, lots of times I used it as gifts for my sister's children. When they would come up, you know, if they needed a pair of shoes, or something like that, I always you know, we'd go down and pick them out shoes. [S: Yeah] But now uh, I've become more frugal.

S: Yeah. Um, how did the work situation and the environment at Sprague's, like how is it different from when, when you stop working to when you started way back?

J: Well I, I think when I first started working it was more enjoyable. It was um, more, even the management people were, seemed to be more relaxed. I think now a days, even though I haven't work there going on three years, I think one of the things that was wrong is that the management people also had to feel the impact on jobs being lost. And I know they were worried about whether they were going to have the job, which is only natural. So their, sometimes their dispositions and their moods were not just the greatest, because uh, there was always constant worry. Am I going to have a job? And especially if you got a family. You bought a house, you got a car, where am I going to get this money? And so that they're, and our disposition sometimes weren't the greatest, all because of worry, frustration, on what was going to happen to you, to your department. [S: Yeah] So I think that that had an awful bad impact. Even now.

S: Yeah. I know what you mean. My father tells (--)

J: You know, they worry all the time. You know, and it's only natural. Especially if you're young, and your father's not that old. Or anybody that's around your father's age has to worry about uh, I'm sure that your father is smart enough that if he did lose his job, or some of the other people that are on the management level would move out of the area, and I'm sure that they would be able to find jobs. But it's not like being here in North Adams where you grew up and had children. And you know, most people when they get to be a certain age they don't want to leave, they want to be able to stay with the company. And I think that's one of the things that really bothers.

S: Yeah, I understand. Um, so you had a good, good attitude towards management I take it, like back in the, when you first started?

J: Yeah, I always uh, I had a excellent, when I first went to Sprague's I had two excellent bosses who were very nice. They um, always um, were very nice to us. They uh, of course you're working for people. Uh, they have certain things that they have to get out and naturally sometimes they had to come down on you if you're doing something that you're not suppose to be, or if you if they think you're not working hard enough. But that's all in the line of working you know. After awhile you know, you realize this. That you know, you're not there just for fun. You're there to put out a days work, and your boss is there to see that you do it. So you still, but you can still have a good relationship.

S: Yeah. Do you remember their names those two bosses?

J: Yeah, Mr. Telericco, he was Head of the Shipping Department. And our supervisor was Pat Davis. Phil Telericco. And I would, I've been, in fact I was friends with him for years and years, even after I didn't work in his department. I uh, he moved to New Hampshire when he was sick and I used to visit him. He died, but up until that point we were always friends.

S: That's good. Um, okay. Do you know why uh, well you probably do, why Sprague reduced it's work force, and like they closed a lot of local plants in recent years, and why they moved

away?

J: Well one of the reason I would say is because they thought that they would not have all of their eggs in one basket. That if we went on strike that everything wouldn't be located here in North Adams. That was one of the reasons. For other reasons, uh, the shipping were closer to lines, like trains, air, that was done. And a lot of them um, they just wanted to, they had uh, when they would leave here they always had modern plants. And I think that was one of the things, you know, the money part in fixing up some of these old buildings, which they had done cost a lot of money.

S: Yeah.

J: They, I know they used to talk about the old boiler and how much money it cost to heat the buildings and stuff. That was one, that was another major concern.

S: Yeah, okay. Um, so what do you think Sprague's overall impact on the community was, and how you, your overall impression?

J: I think it was devastating. I think a lot of people have moved out of the area because they had to find other jobs. Um, they were used to having um, a certain income. What I think about it? I think it was terrible, because they didn't have any loyalty or tried to have any loyalty to the employees that had worked there so many years.

S: This is when it moved away you said?

J: Uh, when they moved, because they didn't really stop and even things about us. All they thought about is you know, they're leaving and uh, they didn't realize that the people that they had working for them did such a good job, and then they lost millions when they moved to Mansfield. And uh, I do know that they did say that if they ever had to, if they have to have lived over again they never would have made some of the choices they made. They, I know they tried to come back, but uh, of course the company that owned them said no, you made the choice to leave. So that they, they wouldn't let them come back.

S: Yeah, so what's your overall impression?

J: My overall impression that is was very sad. I was one of the fortunate ones that got you know, got a good job. But they're still some of the people that are out there that uh, don't have a job that was equal to what they had. It's harder for them. A lot of people retired. When you were sixty you could retire. So the women retired. Their husbands had other jobs, so they did retire. So I think overall it was bad, economically devastating [S: Yeah] for everybody. Okay. I'm not too thrilled, I was not too thrilled about it.

S: [Unclear] they decided to leave, but it was good when, but it was good for the community when it was you know, thriving and [unclear].

J: When we had a striving Sprague Electric, yes, it was good for the community, because we

made pretty good money. And I think some of the people now who are unemployed, or have jobs that don't pay as much realize that we weren't too bad off, and that they, maybe if they had considered it a little more we wouldn't be in the bad shape that we are. Economically the city had suffered, because uh, you see yourself how many stores has moved out of town.

S: Yeah, it's really bad.

J: And uh, we did have a lot of uh, like England Brothers, which was a nice store. What we need now is a store that is geared to the people's pocketbook. Right now we have a few stores, but uh, and I bought my clothes there many years, but when you go up and you see a dress sixty and seventy dollars, you know, you can't buy it. [S: Yeah] So I think what we need is a little more medium priced stores.

S: Yeah. Okay. Well I guess that's it unless you have anything you'd like to say, or (--)

J: No.

S: Okay, well thank you very much.

J: Oh you're welcome very much.

S: Okay.